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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
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Summary record of the 1646th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 1 November 2018, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Halperin-Kaddari (Vice-Chair)

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Ms. Halperin-Kaddari, Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (*continued*) (CEDAW/C/MKD/6; CEDAW/C/MKD/Q/6, CEDAW/C/MKD/Q/6/Add.1 and CEDAW/C/MKD/Q/6/Add.1/Rev.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 7 to 9 (*continued*)

2. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that more details were needed about the State party's efforts to reduce statelessness and promote birth registration. The fact that undocumented women could be denied access to maternity care and could not give birth in hospitals perpetuated a vicious circle whereby lack of documentation impeded access to health care, birth registration, education and labour market participation and increased the risk of exploitation and abuse. As Roma women and girls were particularly likely to find themselves trapped in that vicious circle, she also invited the State party to explain what additional measures were being taken to address the intersectional discrimination that was both a cause and consequence of statelessness within the Roma community.

3. **Ms. Mustafova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), sharing a few figures on women's participation in political and public life, said that, in the 2016 parliamentary elections, 41 of the 120 members elected had been women, but, in the 2017 local elections, only 15 of the 260 mayoral candidates had been women, and only 6 of them had been successful. Just under a third of local government councillors were women. In total 40 per cent of staff members of the Ministry of Defence were female, although women accounted for less than 10 per cent of army personnel and over 50 per cent of civilian personnel. Approximately 150 women had participated in peace missions under Security Council resolution 1335 (2001) on the situation in Croatia. The Ministry of Defence was committed to implementing the principle of equal opportunities for men and women and army personnel received gender training in preparation for peace missions.

4. **Ms. Nikolova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, as a result of the quota requirements introduced to the Electoral Code before the 2016 elections and following subsequent post-election adjustments, women accounted for approximately 40 per cent of Members of Parliament, in line with the quota set. It was important to note that female candidates were not placed at the bottom of electoral lists but were evenly distributed throughout. The State party now had a female Deputy Prime Minister, a female Deputy Speaker and four women heading up high-profile ministries, including the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Women also chaired 7 of the 21 Commissions of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, the country's legislature, and were deputy chairs of a further 9. The Women Parliamentarians' Club was growing in importance and influence as a result. Consent for an increase in the quota to 50 per cent had already been obtained in principle.

5. Although the quota requirement had not been achieved in local government, there had been a significant improvement in women's representation. The Government was examining ways to improve on current levels and had made a comparative analysis of models used in other countries to that end. She was confident that an effective solution would be found. With support from international organizations, training was being provided to accelerate progress, including capacity- and confidence-building courses for prospective female candidates. She hoped that such training would in the near future be formally covered in legislation.

6. **Ms. Zdravkovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), referring to women's representation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that the principles of equitable representation and equal opportunities were formally established in the Foreign

Affairs Act of 2006 and were applied in all ambassadorial appointments. At present, women occupied 4 of a total of 22 ambassador positions. In addition, 4 of the 15 director-level posts in the Ministry were occupied by women, 15 of the 37 assistant-director positions and 24 of the 67 head of unit positions.

7. **Ms. Kamberi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that action by Roma political leaders was needed to address Roma women's admittedly scant representation in politics. On a more positive note, there were around 150 Roma women currently working in government ministries, including 3 heads of department — an achievement that was without precedent in the region. Furthermore, one of the Deputy Ombudspersons was a Roma woman, as was one of the Ombudsperson's advisers.

8. While it was true that undocumented persons had no legal rights in terms of access to employment, health care and social services, by order of the Government, all children had the right to enrol in elementary school even if they had no identity documents. The aim was to provide them with documents as they completed their education. The Government was working with the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association to resolve the situation of the approximately 700 undocumented persons currently on record, hopefully before the end of 2018. It was also looking to make the legislative amendments necessary to achieve a lasting solution to the problem.

Articles 10 to 14

9. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that, despite a very slight decline at the secondary level, school dropout rates for girls remained worryingly high. She would like to know the reasons for girls' failure to complete compulsory education, which could not be attributed solely, or even primarily, to families moving house and changing schools, as suggested in the replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/MKD/Q/6/Add.1/Rev.1). Recalling that, in its 2016 concluding observations (CERD/C/MKD/CO/8-10) the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had raised concerns about discrimination and segregation impeding the education of Roma children, she asked what was being done to accelerate progress towards an education system that was fully inclusive of Roma children, children with disabilities, children living in remote areas and children from any other disadvantaged group and whether the delegation could provide up-to-date statistics to illustrate progress thus far.

10. She would like to know more about the situation of girls who were placed in residential schools due to a lack of family support. How did the State party protect them from abuse and harassment, including at the hands of those employed to care for them, and how did it ensure that abusers did not enjoy impunity? Information about any measures in place to address the stereotypical portrayal of women as mothers and carers would also be appreciated, as would an update on progress towards the removal of gender stereotypes from school curricula. Noting lastly that women were not well represented in higher education, she asked how many women occupied director-level positions in higher education institutes and how many women, relative to men, were involved in scientific research and teaching.

11. **Mr. Bergby**, noting that the gender pay gap was 13 per cent according to official data but 27.4 per cent according to an International Labour Organization study, said that he was concerned about the lack of reliable data to measure the scale of the problem, the lack of research to enhance understanding of its causes and the lack of measures to address them. When would the State party attend to the urgent need for extensive data gathering and research on that subject? The delegation might also clarify whether the provisions of the Labour Relations Act that imposed a requirement for equal pay for equal work in equal conditions should be interpreted as referring to equal work or work of equal value. It should also provide details of the control mechanisms in place to ensure respect for that principle.

12. Although the introduction of a minimum wage was a positive step, pay and working conditions in the garments industry, where over 80 per cent of the workforce was female, remained unsatisfactory, as the average wage in the sector was approximately 60 per cent lower than the national average. In addition, in 2017, 715 cases of violations of labour rights involving 2,466 garment workers from 72 garment factories across the country had

been documented. He would therefore like to know what the Government planned to do to guarantee women's right to equal remuneration and equal treatment in the workplace.

13. The current nine months' paid maternity leave entitlement was good in principle but available only to women in formal employment. The delegation might therefore describe what was being done to ensure equivalent benefits for the 50 per cent or more of pregnant women who were employed in the informal economy. He would also like further information about the cost of childcare. Clarification as to current paternity leave entitlements was also needed. It appeared that, at present, fathers were entitled to just seven days. Would that entitlement be extended to at least 20 days to make it easier for women to return to work and to encourage men to assume more of the care-giving role, and would the State party consider making paternity leave mandatory? The delegation might also clarify whether the legal provision that exempted employees with children under the age of 3 years old from working overtime or night shifts unless they gave their prior, written consent applied to men as well as to women. Noting lastly that the different retirement ages established for men and women exacerbated the effects of the gender pay gap by limiting women's potential pension income still further, he asked whether the State party had any plans to address that disparity.

14. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she wished to know more about the new programmes introduced to enhance care for women diagnosed with breast cancer, cervical cancer and other illnesses primarily affecting women and about the new sexual and reproductive health-care strategy that was due to be introduced over the next decade. For example, would sexual and reproductive health education be improved; would modules be developed for all levels of education and also for medical personnel; would a community-based system that ensured coverage across the entire country be established; and would access to contraceptive devices be guaranteed for all women?

15. More detail about the content of the bill on termination of pregnancy currently pending adoption and the obstacles that had delayed its passage would be useful. She would particularly like to know what time frame was envisaged for the enactment of the legislation; whether women's organizations had been consulted in the law's preparation; and whether its implementation would be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns in schools. Lastly, could the delegation confirm that the high risk groups targeted under the country's HIV/AIDS prevention programme included women engaged in sex work and transgender women, and that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were able to obtain medical care free from stigmatization and discrimination?

16. **Ms. Kamberi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government was proud of the progress it had made in integrating the Roma population and that the country had achieved the best figures in the fields of education and employment of all States involved in the Roma Integration 2020 project implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council. Since 2006, the Roma Education Fund had been paying for approximately 500 Roma children a year to attend preschool free of charge. The beneficiaries were integrated with children from non-Roma backgrounds although 19 Roma assistants had been recruited to lend their support. Teaching assistants from Roma backgrounds were also employed to facilitate the integration of Roma children in elementary and secondary education, which were compulsory for all children, including Roma. At present, 8,785 of the just over 185,000 children in elementary school were from a Roma background and 1,420 out of nearly 78,000 pupils in secondary school were Roma, under half of them girls. The Government used various strategies to keep Roma teenagers in school, including providing scholarships from the Roma Education Fund. In the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years, 582 and 736 secondary school scholarships had been granted respectively with Roma girls accounting for the majority of recipients in each case. Scholarships were also available under a conditional cash transfer programme run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with funding from the World Bank that provided assistance to all socially disadvantaged families.

17. **Ms. Mustafova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, in the 2015/16 academic year, 2,525 children had dropped out of school, with the main reason being relocation. Of those children, 1,206 had been girls. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and

Science, had recategorized students in special schools to ensure that children with mild disabilities, who accounted for around 70 per cent of the total, were included in the mainstream education system. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had developed a rule book based on a functional approach to measuring disability. The book would be piloted in several municipalities in 2019. The Ministry was in the process of establishing a working group to analyse school textbooks with the overall aim of furthering efforts to remove discriminatory content. The analysis was expected to be complete by the end of 2019. Statistics on women's participation in decision-making positions were being collected by the Sector for Equal Opportunities within the Ministry and would be available in due course.

18. **Ms. Spasovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the conditional cash assistance programme was implemented to provide additional support to secondary-school students who regularly attended classes and whose families were already beneficiaries of social welfare. Eligibility for financial aid for education was set to be extended to all students from low-income families. Specific measures were in place to help single parents, particularly single mothers. In cases of domestic violence, the perpetrator's income was not counted for the purposes of calculating benefit entitlements.

19. To promote women's participation in the labour market, the Government was expanding the network of kindergartens, including in rural areas. In 2018 alone, 24 facilities, with the capacity to care for 600 children, had been opened. Under a bill that was currently being drafted, State funds would be used to cover the kindergarten expenses of poor families.

20. Pursuant to a Constitutional Court ruling annulling a discriminatory provision of retirement legislation, the retirement age for men and women had been equalized, at 67 years.

21. **Ms. Shkrijelj** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that more than half the women in her country were considered to be economically inactive. The requirement of actively searching for work in order to qualify for unemployment benefits had been lifted in 2017.

22. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was introducing reforms to enhance support for women performing unpaid domestic work. A bill on labour relations was in the pipeline and should enter into force in January 2019. Legislative amendments were also being considered to provide for more flexible working arrangements.

23. The bill on labour relations enshrined the principle of equal pay for equal work. The scope of legal provisions on the minimum wage had been extended to cover workers in the textile industry, where women were disproportionately represented. The minimum wage had also been raised, and the Government intended to incentivize employers to improve working conditions. Although the minimum wage was still not high enough to guarantee an adequate standard of living, many low-income earners were entitled to child support and other benefits. Frequent violations of the Law on Minimum Monthly Wage had prompted the Government to strengthen the capacity of the State Labour Inspectorate, which was responsible for monitoring respect for workers' rights. The Inspectorate had conducted 8,000 inspections in 2018 and planned to carry out a further 18,000 in 2019.

24. The Government's investment in kindergartens was expected to be very worthwhile in terms of promoting early childhood development. With the assistance of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, a cost-benefit analysis would be conducted to measure the long-term impact on the economy.

25. Social welfare offices were being opened in all municipalities in the country with the aim of providing integrated case management. The offices would collaborate with job centres to offer a package of measures to women who were long-term unemployed, including psychosocial support and rehabilitation, and further education and training.

26. **Ms. Carovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, in 2019, the Government intended to increase wages in the social care and childcare sectors, in which women were disproportionately employed.

27. **Ms. Mustafova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the bill on labour relations would bring domestic provisions on maternity and paternity leave into line with international standards. The spirit of the bill was that raising a child should be the responsibility of both parents. With that in mind, the idea of mandatory paternity leave was being discussed. The bill, which would be adopted in 2019, would also provide for the possibility for parents to telecommute.

28. In accordance with the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men, a tool had been developed to identify and punish employers that violated the right to equal pay for equal work.

29. **Mr. Filipche** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, for many years, there had been no strategy for the development of the health sector in his country, as a result of which constitutional guarantees concerning the right to health were endangered. In the previous decade, 1,300 doctors had emigrated, leading to staff shortages. The provision of medical services was further hampered by seriously outdated equipment and dilapidated facilities. Many patients, particularly those belonging to vulnerable groups, consequently received inadequate treatment, which went some way towards explaining the extremely high infant mortality rate and the poor outcomes of cancer patients.

30. The current Government had prioritized the issue of health and had undertaken a series of initiatives, the first results of which were beginning to show. It had invested in infant incubators, the training of doctors and a reform of the system for the provision of gynaecological services. It had also endeavoured to improve medical facilities and equipment and to encourage an exchange of knowledge and experience with health professionals from other countries.

31. Cancer screening programmes were badly compromised by insufficient staff numbers and the complete inadequacy of radiological equipment. The renewal of that equipment, which was anticipated to take place in 2019, would enable an analysis of the interpretation of screening test results to be carried out.

32. The law on health insurance was being amended to pave the way for the addition of cytostatin to the list of approved therapies covered by the Health Insurance Fund. It would be the first time in some 10 years that a new therapy had been included in the list. A commission was being set up to review the list and remove cheap medicines that had little or no therapeutic value. There were plans to set money aside to improve the availability and quality of orthopaedic care, and campaigns were under way to raise awareness among health professionals and the general public of the important role played by human papilloma virus vaccines, the coverage rate for which was below 50 per cent.

33. A comprehensive assessment of the health-care system was being undertaken and should be completed by April 2019. The Government was cooperating with the World Health Organization and the World Bank to reform the system of primary health care. It was looking for ways to retain doctors and attract young people to the medical profession. While there was a national shortage of primary gynaecologists, mobile teams had been deployed as part of a pilot project to offer community-based gynaecological services in remote, rural areas of the country. Depending on the success of the project, the services might be expanded nationwide. The Government was also working with the World Bank to develop a public-private partnership to fund the provision of gynaecological care.

34. As it stood, the law on abortion was very discriminatory, since it limited women's access to abortion, and the medical boards that women wishing to have an abortion were required to consult under the law often took too long to issue their opinions, which resulted in higher risks of medical complications. The Government had been working in consultation with non-governmental organizations on the new legislation, which put greater emphasis on women's wishes. The law would provide for medical abortion and, in cases in which women expressed their desire to have an abortion after the twenty-second week of pregnancy, the boards would be expanded to include surgeons and other medical specialists.

35. **Ms. Atanasova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Ministry of Health was implementing a specific health-care programme for mothers and

children that had helped to remove barriers to access for women from vulnerable groups, including Roma women and women without identity documents. Under the programme, free hospital care was provided to children and pregnant women from vulnerable groups, and to all children under 1 year of age. Women could also receive free counselling and contraception at health centres.

36. The Ministry had also drawn up clinical guidelines on the early detection of cervical cancer and the treatment of post-partum bleeding, which had contributed to a reduction in the infant mortality rate. In addition, a plan of action on reproductive health had been adopted for the period 2018–2021. The plan provided for measures in the areas of family planning, sex education for adolescents, maternal and neonatal health, abortion, gender-based violence, sexually transmitted diseases and the prevention of, and protection against, cervical cancer.

37. **Mr. Bergby** said that he would be interested to know whether, in the Constitutional Court ruling annulling a discriminatory provision of retirement legislation, reference had been made to the Convention. An indication of whether the ruling had been implemented would also be appreciated.

38. Noting reports that 47 per cent of unemployed rural women were performing unpaid work in family farms, he asked what could be done to recognize such work in the interests of facilitating access to social benefits and pensions.

39. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she would be grateful to hear from the delegation about what could be done to ensure that members of abortion advisory boards did not go beyond their mandate and impose their own ethical standards. She drew the delegation's attention to recent recommendations from other human rights treaty bodies concerning the school segregation of Roma children and children with mental disabilities in particular, and noted that she had received no reply to her question on the sexual abuse suffered by girls in boarding schools.

40. **Ms. Carovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the discriminatory provision regarding the retirement age for men and women was null and void, as per the ruling of the Constitutional Court.

41. A system was in place to monitor whether professionals in a number of fields, including the health sector, were acting in accordance with the law. Should a member of an abortion advisory board go beyond his or her mandate, appropriate legal and other action would be taken.

42. One particular boarding school for girls where there had been cases of sexual abuse had been transformed and reopened in August 2018 as a community-based assisted living facility. There were plans to transform a further three boarding schools in Skopje within the coming six months.

43. **Ms. Kikerekova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the bill on the prevention of, and protection against, discrimination set out definitions of both "segregation" and "disability" and established that segregation was a form of discrimination, which would enable action to be taken whenever segregation was identified. The definition of "disability" in the bill was a uniform definition that was being introduced in all relevant domestic laws.

44. **Ms. Mustafova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Constitutional Court regularly cited international human rights treaties, including the Convention, in its rulings.

45. **Ms. Ameline** said that she would welcome more information on the State party's investment policies to support rural women. The Committee's general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women could serve as a road map to open up opportunities in the formal labour market and promote rural women's entrepreneurial skills.

46. Noting that the State party had made a considerable number of commitments to improving access to services in rural areas, she wondered whether it would be able to meet its goals in the short term. She would be interested to learn what the Government was doing to ensure that women shared in expanding areas of the economy such as tourism and digital

technology. To what extent did the private sector cooperate with the Government's efforts to enhance social protection?

47. In view of the fact that youth unemployment was very high, she asked what measures were being taken to enable young people to find employment. It would be interesting to learn whether Roma women, who found it particularly difficult to enter the labour market, would be provided with training to improve their chances of finding decent jobs.

48. Noting that refugees often experienced difficulties along the border with Greece, she asked what short-term measures were being taken to provide legal and humanitarian support to women refugees and asylum seekers. She wondered how many refugee women were given support, including in shelters, and what obstacles the State party faced in its efforts to uphold the right to asylum and grant refugees temporary residence status.

49. The Committee would welcome further information on any actions taken under the Romacted project of the European Union and Council of Europe to provide assistance to the Roma community.

50. **Ms. Shkrijelj** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that her Government was working with NGOs in order to give vulnerable groups the opportunity to participate in the drafting of policies and programmes that concerned them. Steps had been taken to identify the laws that needed to be amended to ensure that women's rights to own and inherit property were protected. In order to facilitate rural women's entry into the workforce, efforts had been made to free them from unpaid care work by enhancing access to childcare, including through the introduction of registered childminders who worked out of their homes, and to care for older persons. New kindergartens had been opened in rural areas with limited access to childcare services and high rates of unemployment among women.

51. The Ministry of Finance provided grants to promote entrepreneurship among women. In addition, a strategy for supporting women entrepreneurs would soon be rolled out. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had drafted a document containing policies on employment and self-employment. In accordance with the established regulations, at least 40 per cent of the beneficiaries of those policies were required to be women.

52. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was the first non-member of the European Union to have begun implementing the European Union Youth Guarantee Programme. That programme, which was being piloted in three municipalities, was aimed at facilitating entry into the labour market for young people not in education, employment or training. In cooperation with youth organizations, youth workers were made responsible for identifying potential beneficiaries of the programme and including them in the measures established under it. Equal numbers of boys and girls were participating in the programme and the results obtained to date had exceeded expectations. In 2019, the budget allocated to the programme would be increased so that it could be extended to the entire country.

53. **Ms. Kamberi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that over 300 Roma, including 158 women, were participating in the European Union Youth Guarantee Programme. The employment prospects of young Roma had also benefited from the strategy for the Roma community in the country under which new jobs and internships had been created, grants had been made available to promote self-employment and training had been provided in certain occupations and trades.

54. Almost 6,000 Roma, including around 300 women, had registered with the Agency for Employment. The Romacted programme had been initiated in March 2019 in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and 14 municipalities. A representative of a Roma NGO had been appointed as the focal point for the programme, under which efforts were being made to strengthen the capacity of institutions at the local level and assess the results of local action plans.

55. **Ms. Carovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that persons entering the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia who applied for asylum or temporary residency were provided with all the necessary services, including access to health care and education. A number of such persons were employed in the social protection system as

interpreters and fulfilled other functions. Conditions and staffing levels at the centre for asylum seekers had been enhanced.

Articles 15 and 16

56. **The Chair** said that, despite the obvious political will to improve women's rights shown by the delegation throughout the dialogue, no significant steps had been taken to combat child marriage during the reporting period. Although the legislation governing marriage was fairly robust, in that it established a minimum age for marriage of 18 years and provided that persons of 16 and 17 years of age could marry only with a court order, the enforcement of the law left much to be desired, possibly because there was no mandatory requirement for marriages to be registered. In view of that situation, she wished to know how the prohibition of child marriage was currently being enforced and whether the Government would consider making it mandatory for all marriages to be registered. It was not clear whether article 197 of the Criminal Code, which criminalized de facto marriage between an adult and a child aged 14 to 16, also covered children over 16 and other forms of child marriage. She wished to know whether there were other provisions of the law that dealt with the matter. The Committee would welcome information on the number of prosecutions initiated and convictions secured under the article. It wondered whether the Government was aware that an increasing number of child brides from less-developed parts of the country were being purchased in what amounted to a form of domestic human trafficking.

57. The Committee would welcome clarification of the delegation's comments to the effect that the country's inheritance law would need to be amended in order to protect women's property rights. In its view, restrictions on the marital property rights of women resulted from traditions and customs rather than from any shortcomings in the relevant legislation.

58. Lastly, she wished to know whether the marital property considered when a couple applied for a divorce included pension rights, savings, severance payments or future earning potential.

59. **Ms. Kikerekova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, although the majority of child marriages took place within the Roma community, and were motivated by poverty, social exclusion and cultural norms, the Government was taking steps to protect the rights of all children as no tradition was above the law. Under article 197 of the Criminal Code, punishments were imposed on any adult living in an intimate relationship with a child between the ages of 14 and 16 years and on any parent or guardian who allowed such a relationship to take place. Steps would be taken to extend the scope of article 197 to persons of 16 and 17 years of age and their parents and guardians. In order to comprehensively tackle the problem of child marriage, however, a multisectoral approach would need to be taken. In that regard, it would be necessary to conduct awareness-raising campaigns on child marriage, develop a programme on the prevention of that practice and train professionals who worked with families and children.

60. **Ms. Spasovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government would take steps to ensure that child marriages never took place and that all children were protected against abuse and neglect. The Family Act established that any person wishing to marry must be at least 18 years of age unless he or she had obtained a court order and medical authorization. In view of the fact that child marriage was a problem that required a multisectoral approach, a national coordination body for the protection of children had been established. In 2017, that body had conducted a comprehensive study of State mechanisms aimed at combating child marriage in conjunction with UNICEF. In the light of the study, consideration was being given to the legislative changes required to protect children from all forms of violence. The capacities of the institutions responsible for monitoring violence against children had been increased in order to enable them to collect data on acts of violence against children. In conjunction with UNICEF, additional training was being provided to the staff of the bodies responsible for combating violence against children in all municipalities.

61. **Ms. Shkrijelj** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the existing law on marital property provided that all property accumulated during the marriage must be distributed equally in the event of divorce. Patriarchal attitudes posed the main challenge to the property rights of women, who sometimes abandoned their rights in favour of their brothers. In order to combat such attitudes, efforts would be made to raise women's awareness of their rights. Women sometimes found it difficult to prove that property registered in a husband's name had been accumulated during the marriage and were sometimes left with nothing when they divorced. In order to address that problem, legislative changes would be made to enable property accumulated during a marriage to be reregistered as joint property, subject to the written agreement of both parties.

62. **The Chair** said that she had still not received answers to her questions concerning prosecutions brought under article 197 of the Criminal Code. In view of the fact that women might find it very difficult to obtain their husband's consent when reregistering property as joint property, she asked whether any other measures had been implemented to protect women's property rights. The Committee would be interested to learn whether the courts were instructed to take allegations or occurrences of domestic violence against mothers into account in decisions relating to the custody of children.

63. **Ms. Spasovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the courts were required to take allegations of domestic violence into account in decisions relating to the custody of children. When a couple with children divorced, centres for social work considered each individual case and made recommendations to the courts concerning custody that always took the best interests of the child into account. The professionals who considered such cases were equipped with legislative tools to assess the level of domestic violence taking place.

64. **Ms. Shkrijelj** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the parties to a marriage were required by law to reregister any property accumulated during the marriage as joint property. Pension rights were not included in the marital property distributed between a couple in the event of divorce. However, all citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were entitled to a minimum State pension.

65. **The Chair** said that, where the issue of marital property was concerned, the Government should consider the Committee's general recommendation No. 29 (2013) on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution.

66. **Ms. Carovska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that she wished to thank the Committee members for the questions that they had asked. The delegation had shown that there was a political will to advance women's rights, which the Government would continue to do in collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.